

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 12 February 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Cox, Hobson, G Rogers, Rooney and Williams.

OFFICIALS: J Bennington, A Crawford, E Bennett, P Clark, S Harker and L Maughan.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Mayor (Ray Mallon)
Councillor Mrs B Thompson (Executive Member Children, Families and Learning)

**** PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER:** Councillor Hubbard.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Biswas, Dryden, Ismail, Mawston and Sanderson.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 15 and 21 January 2008 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

MAYOR

The Chair welcomed the Mayor to the meeting to advise on his key aims and objectives.

By way of introduction the Mayor gave an indication of the main areas of activity since being elected in 2002 the focus of which initially was to more clearly identify the Council's areas of priority in order to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

The Raising Hope vision for Middlesbrough was established focussing on environment, regeneration, business community and transport underpinning the education of young people and support for vulnerable people. In terms of education, attainment was not the only important area upon which to focus but an indication was given of other important work such as that surrounding exclusion.

The Mayor had introduced the Reduction Agenda which focussed on tackling priorities at the root causes of problems on such areas as alcohol abuse, smoking, obesity, school exclusions, absenteeism and unemployment. One of the main areas of work centred on preventative measures in terms of the public health agenda.

The Mayor had a key role to play in ensuring that Council services were delivered effectively and efficiently and bringing together different organisations working together in partnership.

In response to Members' questions the Mayor indicated some of the constraints and frustrations which mainly centred on the financial implications of population drift in respect of the Revenue Support Grant Settlement and what were considered to be an excessive amount of performance indicators.

An indication was given of the communication with Members of the Council and the importance of ensuring that it was a two way process in dealing with Ward issues. In terms of the Government's drive towards devolved budgets the Mayor referred to the current arrangements in terms of Community Councils and indicated his lack of support of what was seen as another administrative structure.

Reference was made to recent discussion regarding the procedures for Council meetings and acknowledgement that although difficult given the nature of such meetings there was support for the endeavours to improve the current process.

In commenting on the Ward profiles and social deprivation it was acknowledged that the ongoing work involving a range of measures in order to tackle worklessness was of overriding importance.

ORDERED that the Mayor be thanked for the information provided and contribution to the meeting.

DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY POLICY 2007/2010

The Director of Human Resources presented the Council's Diversity and Equality Policy 2007/2010, which set out the responsibilities of Members, employees and partners of Middlesbrough Council. The policy demonstrated how the Council would work to achieve equality and fairness of treatment for everyone and complemented the work being done under the Race Equality Scheme 2005-2008, the Disability Equality Scheme 2008-2009 and the Gender Equality Scheme 2007-2010.

The Council aimed to develop a greater understanding of equal opportunities issues and amongst Members and employees. Training was encouraged and an induction course for new employees and managers included briefing/training in the Council's Diversity and Equality Policy. Specialist courses were provided where detailed knowledge was required. In terms of Member training a slot had been included in the Member Development Programme.

Members supported the report which was considered to very comprehensive. It was suggested that on page 29 of the report under the heading of Race it should be more clearly defined in that the words of 'rather than say' and 'avoid terms' should be replaced with 'do not use'.

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the Executive be recommended to endorse the report subject to the suggestion of the changed wording on page 29 of the document as outlined above.
2. That Members be encouraged to attend the proposed training in the Member Development Programme.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING OUTCOMES AND SURE START

The Vice Chair of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel gave an outline of the process of investigation and presented the findings of the Panel's scrutiny review into Early Years Learning Outcomes and Sure Start.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on the submitted evidence:

1. That learning outcomes should be identified by Sure Start as a priority and services should be more focused on that objective. Each centre should be clear about how its activities contribute to learning and, if necessary, the number of initiatives undertaken should be reduced to enable a greater focus on improving learning outcomes.
2. That an assessment is made of all Sure Start activities to determine what works best in terms of improving outcomes.
3. That a monitoring or tracking system is developed, for example, using Foundation Stage Profile Data to assess the impact that Sure Start is having on early years learning outcomes. If possible, the achievement levels of children who have been involved in Sure Start programmes should be assessed against those who have not. This would enable services to be developed that are aimed at improving learning outcomes.

4. That work to maximise the take up of Sure Start services is continued, including developing the services to cover areas of Middlesbrough where there are gaps in provision.
5. That the work done to date to encourage day care staff to undertake relevant training and qualifications is continued and that increased training is provided for private children's day care providers in relation to the long-term benefits of early years learning.
6. That the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel is kept informed of the future development and roll-out of Sure Start Children's Centres. Monitoring reports should be submitted to the Panel, at least annually, in respect of the planned expansion of services.

The Board sought clarification on a number of areas including:-

- a) an assurance that there was close liaison with all agencies including Social Care and appropriate interventions;
- b) although in overall terms when comparing percentages of children scoring at the higher levels Middlesbrough was not doing as well as statistical neighbours, good progress had been made against Early Years Outcomes Duty targets in 2007 and had exceeded some 2008 targets;
- c) specific reference was made to the evidence that demonstrated that early years and Sure Start services were not just important for providing early years learning opportunities but was beneficial in children's health, personal development and in developing social skills.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

DEVELOPING ROLE OF THE STREET WARDEN SERVICE

The Chair of the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel gave an outline of the process of investigation and presented the findings of the Panel's scrutiny review into the developing role of the Street Warden Service.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on the submitted evidence:

- a) That the warden service should be re-launched to reinforce the responsibilities of their new role to the public, the re-launch should also include adding the information to the wardens' section on the Council's website.
- b) That the Police and the Council continue to work closely together and consider the options of:
 - i) the introduction of joint briefing meetings;
 - ii) wardens joining Police on patrols and vice versa not as a regular event but for each organisation to gain an insight into the respective roles.
- c) That a process is developed to clearly identify street wardens' roles and to ensure that there is a consistency of approach in management styles. A record of wardens' activities should be introduced in order to monitor wardens' workload to ensure that their role is balanced accordingly.
- d) That the introduction of single person patrols should not be implemented.
- e) That the production of a yearly public survey should continue but should be developed to enable the results to provide a more thorough evaluation of the service. That Officers report back

to the Panel on how they are going to undertake the survey and how it will join up with the Place Survey due to be undertaken.

- f) That the wardens continue to work with the youth service to ensure that there is no duplication of services.
- g) That wardens should be given the opportunity to attend training sessions that are outside of their shift so as not to impact on service provision. Consideration should also be given to the future training needs of wardens to ensure that their developing needs can be provided for.
- h) That consideration should be given to establishing improved ways of working between wardens and enforcement officers to ensure effective liaison between the two so that as many incidents as possible are reported and dealt with.
- i) The Panel endorses the current management arrangements and does not want to advocate the introduction of enforcement powers for wardens.
- j) That Officers investigate the possibility of seeking an external audit of the Street Warden Service in order to assess the standard of the service.

Members supported the recommendations and in particular referred to the importance of the recommendation to establish improved ways of working between wardens and enforcement officers to ensure effective liaison on the reporting of incidences and that appropriate action was taken.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

TEENAGERS HANGING AROUND

The Chair of the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel gave an outline of the process of investigation and presented the findings of the Panel's scrutiny review into 'Teenagers Hanging Around'.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on the submitted evidence:

- a) That the Executive considers the Council's Pricing Policy with the aim of allowing free access to leisure centres for teenagers. This would encourage usage and ensure the Council was taking a responsible approach to the welfare of its communities and potentially reducing incidents involving teenagers.
- b) To propose an article be written for inclusion in Middlesbrough News, which raises awareness of the work outreach workers are having with teenagers.
- c) To increase publicity for general awareness on the achievements in crime reduction in Middlesbrough and the evidence that the vast majority of teenagers simply congregate as a social activity.
- d) Encourage the Police to explore the ability to hold a teenager, which has been involved with anti-social behaviour until the parent comes to collect them. Also that the Police explore the ability to attribute a fine for this as a deterrent to future occurrences.

In considering the recommendations the Board expressed reservations concerning recommendation (d) in particular the powers available to the Police in issuing a suggested fine of this nature.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Community Safety and Leisure Services Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive subject to the deletion of recommendation (d).

SCRUTINY REQUEST – PLAY SCHEME PROVISION

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a report, which outlined a request from the Davison Trust for a scrutiny review into Play Scheme Provision within Middlesbrough.

The Trust Fund was for the benefit of Middlesbrough children with special needs. One of the regular sources of applications was for children's play schemes during school holidays. The Trust was principally there to provide funding in circumstances where there was no other mainstream funding available where appropriate to that particular need.

The Board was advised that the issue of provision of play scheme places for children with complex needs and who could not be integrated within a mainstream but inclusive facility was becoming an increasingly regular item of discussion. The Trust considered that such a service should be within the Councils play strategy and that children with special and complex needs should receive fair and appropriate consideration in such a strategy.

ORDERED that the matter be considered for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Programme 2008/2009.

SCRUTINY REQUEST – EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE – EAST MIDDLESBROUGH

In a report of the Scrutiny Support Officer the Board was advised of a request which had been received from two Members to undertake an investigation into 'collaboration between agencies serving East Middlesbrough in identifying young people in East Middlesbrough aged 16-25 and progressing appropriate Education, Employment & Training opportunities for, and with, them'.

The proposers considered that without judgement, or conclusion about the work of any organisations it was considered appropriate to take stock of interventions so far and how this work can best be delivered in the future. It was considered that any review should focus on: -

- Identifying the numbers who could benefit from the services on offer;
- Identifying the number of employment projects and agencies operating in East Middlesbrough;
- Identifying statutory or contractual obligations and requirements of those agencies;
- Exploring the level of joint working, for example, the level of inter-agency referrals and the information sharing agreements that were in place;
- Commenting on successes of above, identifying numbers actually benefiting from interventions and suggesting any areas for improvement.

ORDERED that the matter be considered for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Programme 2008/2009.

SCRUTINY REQUEST – ERIMUS HOUSING – GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a report which outlined a request from a Member for a scrutiny investigation to be undertaken into the implications of the Council not securing Erimus Housing's grounds maintenance contract.

The principal reason for the request was the need for the Council to ensure that the existing standard of grounds maintenance on Erimus estates was continued. The Board was advised of a concern that the specification for the grounds maintenance works may not require works to be undertaken to the same high standard as currently existed. As it was envisaged that some Council-owned land on Erimus estates would still be maintained by the Local Authority it was considered that this could lead to a two-tier regime of different standards of maintenance.

It was indicated that assurances had been sought during the process of transferring the former Council housing stock to Erimus that existing standards of grounds maintenance would be continued.

ORDERED that the matter be considered for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Programme 2008/2009 or at an earlier stage if the Environment Scrutiny Panel is able to include it within its current work programme.

SCRUTINY PANELS – PROGRESS REPORTS

A report of the Chair of each Scrutiny Panel had been circulated which outlined progress on current activities.

ORDERED that consideration of the reports be deferred to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board scheduled for 11 March 2008.

CALL IN

It was confirmed that no requests for a call-in had been received.

NOTED